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ABSTRACT

This state profile addresses the condition of education in Utah's rural and small schools, placing public schooling and rurality into their social and economic contexts. The "working definition" of "rural" is emphasized, that is, if people served by a school district perceive themselves as rural residents, then the school district is rural. Data were compiled from primary sources, federal and state publications, survey research, policy papers, and discussion among professionals. Three key issues, presented in a state and nationwide context, provide the focus of this profile: (1) the demographic, geographic, social and economic environments in which rural schools operate, featuring wide diversity of landscape and terrain, the highest birth rate in the nation, social values influenced by the Mormon religion, and an economy in recession; (2) low enrollment and inadequate funding faced by Utah's 229 rural schools, low performance and special needs of 86,000 rural students, and low salaries and retention problems of 3,800 rural teachers; and (3) rural school improvement programs organized by the State Office of Education and regional educational service centers. Distance education and educational finance are also examined. This document contains 18 references. (SV)

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A DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC, AND EDUCATIONAL STATE PROFILE

1989

Rural Schools In UTAH

Far West Laboratory
for Educational Research
and Development

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Rural Schools in Utah

A Demographic, Economic, And Educational State Profile 1989

BethAnn Berliner
Patricia Brown
David Coe

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development serves the four-state region of Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah, working with educators at all levels to plan and carry out school improvements. The mission of FWL's Rural Schools Assistance Program is to assist rural educators in the region by linking them with colleagues; sharing information, expertise and innovative practices; and providing technical assistance to build local capacity for continued self-improvement. For further information contact FWL, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103, (415) 565-3000.

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Introduction

Generations of Americans have been educated in rural, small schools. Today, even as metropolitan areas expand, this tradition continues: 56 million people and three-fourths of the nation's school districts are in rural communities. But rural schools have changed. In contrast to a by-gone image, the norm now is a burgeoning student population, transit system, and modern facilities. And as we approach the twenty-first century, even one-room schoolhouses are often flanked by a satellite dish.

Rural and small schools continue to demand our attention because they face issues similar to those in metropolitan areas. They have new immigrants, increasing budget constraints, gifted and special needs students, dropouts, substance abusers and students with various achievement levels and occupational goals. Often the sparsity of population and paucity of professional service providers further complicates efforts to address these issues. But rural schools also have a long history of successfully providing quality education to children. They are filled with teachers, administrators, students, and volunteers whose creativity and commitment is illustrated by innovative curricula, integrated technology programs, provisions for students with special needs and interests, and an ability to do a lot with little.

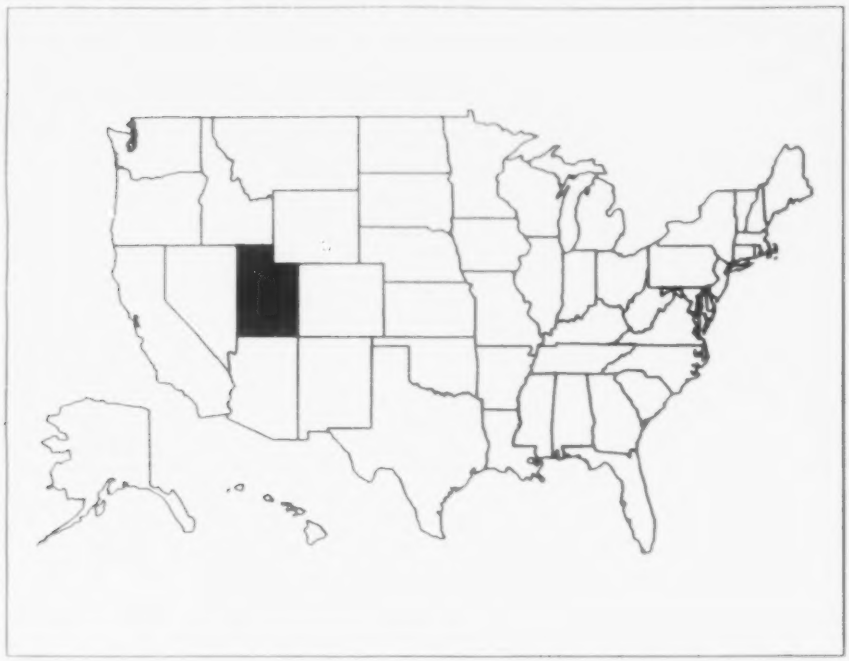
While urban areas are often overwhelmed with the demands of providing quality education for all students, the magnitude of these demands also creates resources. Although the resources exist, they are still insufficient. In rural areas, the singularity of many demands coupled with the lack of economies of scale result in a dearth of resources.

Amid the changes taking place in Utah, rural and small schools continue to play a vital role in the education of the state's young people. Utah's population is steadily growing and its economy appears to be on the upswing. The workforce is young and enterprising, and jobs increasingly require higher levels of skill and education. These trends prevail throughout the Western region and are likely to have a sustained impact on Utah's future in both rural and urban areas (Albert, Hull and Sprague, 1989).

This state profile addresses the condition of education in Utah's rural and small schools. It places public schooling and rurality into their social and economic contexts.

We have used data compiled from primary sources, federal and state publications, survey research, policy papers and discussion among professionals (See References). Unless otherwise specified, data are from 1988. Three key issues, presented in a state and nationwide

context, form the focus of this profile: the social and economic environments in which rural schools operate; characteristics of rural schools, students, and teachers; and school improvement resources. These issues are organized into chapters which identify significant demographic, economic, and educational changes and trends.



What is Rural? The Definition Problem

Educators, scholars, and policymakers have been unable to agree upon a common definition of "rural." Rurality is in the eye of the definer (Owens, 1980). The term evokes images of sparsely populated small towns in agricultural regions or logging, mining, or fishing communities. These communities are often located far from a metropolitan area that provides essential goods and services. Rural communities are often characterized by a limited infrastructure and undiversified economy, and in the Western region by isolation, vast amounts of desert and forest, and a determination not to be "metropolitanized."

Translating these images into concrete definitions has proven to be difficult and subject to the specific needs and concerns of various stakeholders. By default, the term rural has come to mean areas characteristically different from urban and suburban areas—or, officially, "residual ineligible areas" (*Rural America in Passage*, 1982; Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1982; Department of the Interior, 1982). But which characteristics to consider? The federal standard for rural is all areas both within and outside Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas with a population fewer than 2,500 persons and fewer than 1,000 persons per square mile (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1983).

Rurality is in the eye of the definer.

Many rural educators consider this standard inadequate to describe their communities. While population and population density are major characteristics that define a community, other characteristics such as economic base, distance to essential goods and services, cultural institutions, and local history are also important.

In an attempt to clearly define "rural, small school district," a national team of administrators in the mid-1980s conducted an extensive review of current definitions of rural used by federal and state agencies, professional associations, scholars, and practitioners (Stephens and Turner, 1988). Not surprisingly, they found little agreement in these definitions, largely because criteria used were so different. Population density, size, isolation, distance to an urban area, occupation patterns, and sociocultural values all come into play —but with no consistency across definitions. Based on what they learned, the administrators suggested definitions of their own:

1. A community is rural if it is a) either 25 miles or more from a city of 50,000 and not a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area or b) populated by 200 or fewer permanent residents per square mile.

2. A school district is rural if it exists within a rural community or in a county where 60.0 percent or more of the communities are rural.

3. A small school district has a student enrollment of 2,500 or less.

There is likewise no official Utah state definition of a rural, small school district. Utah educators commonly use the following working definition: All 28 school districts outside the heavily populated Wasatch Front area are rural (Nelson, 1987). The State Office of Education makes no further reference to rural schools and defines necessarily existent small schools only in relation to funding formulas (Utah Education Code, Section R300445-3, 1989). This definition is:

> A small school is necessarily existent when 1) the average daily attendance does not exceed 165 for elementary schools, 389 for junior high schools, 417 for senior high schools, and 722 for combined junior-senior high schools, or 2) one-way bus transportation requires elementary students to travel more than 45 minutes and junior and senior high school students more than 75 minutes, or 3) the school is in a district that has been consolidated to the maximum extent possible, or 4) there is evidence acceptable to the superintendent of public instruction that within a period of three years the school's increased growth will no longer require it to be classified as necessarily existent.

Toward A Working Definition

Since the meaning of "rural" and "rural, small school district" is not clear, many educators solve the definition problem by being pragmatic: if the people served by a school district perceive themselves as residents of a rural area, then the school district is rural (National Rural Education Association, 1989; Stephens and Turner, 1988).

This "working definition" of rural is, in part, the basis of Far West Laboratory's following state profile. However, because of the practical need for comparable data, this profile draws heavily upon county information. Based on population and other contextual information, counties were determined to be all urban or primarily rural. Where possible, data will be aggregated to these levels to reveal a statistical portrait of rural Utah. While such an aggregation is not wholly satisfactory, it does allow for comparability across data from various sources while preserving a high degree of accuracy.

The state of Utah is divided into 29 counties and 40 school districts. Twenty-two of these school districts are coterminous with county boundaries. Twelve school districts and over 80 percent of the popu-

lation reside in five densely populated urban counties: Cache, Davis, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Weber. As of 1986, 317,600 of the state's 1.7 million residents lived in the 24 remaining rural counties.

UTAH COUNTIES

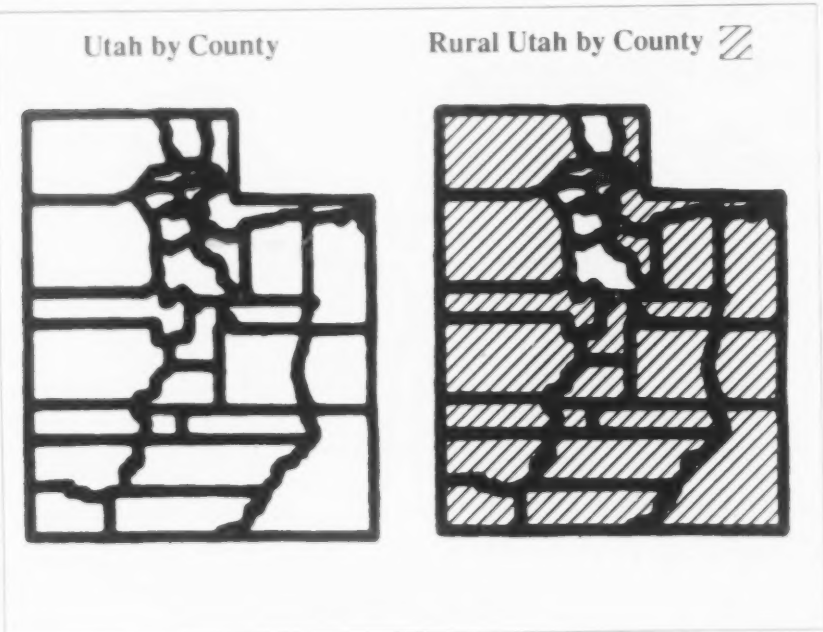
RURAL			URBAN
Beaver	Iron	Sanpete	Cache
Box Elder	Juab	Sevier	Davis
Carbon	Kane	Summit	Salt Lake
Daggett	Millard	Tooele	Utah
Duchesne	Morgan	Uintah	Weber
Emery	Piute	Wasatch	
Garfield	Rich	Washington	
Grand	San Juan	Wayne	

The State of Utah

Geography

Utah's landscape contrasts the towering mountains and multi-colored glaciated canyons with vast salt and alkali deserts and dramatic geologic formations. Two ranges of the Rocky Mountains —the Uintah and the Wasatch—form an angle at the northeast corner of the state. The forested Wasatch range is the backdrop to the Great Salt Lake and the state's capital, Salt Lake City, and the other major metropolitan areas. Its canyons provide water from heavy runoff, creating a strip of agricultural land along its base, and is the location of many wilderness and recreation areas. On the eastern Wasatch slope begins a plateau with deep valleys made by the Colorado, Green and San Juan Rivers. The Great Salt Lake, the largest natural lake west of the Mississippi River, lies in the north. Its water is saltier than ocean water and the lakeside is laced with saltbeds as hard as concrete. South and southwest of the lake is the Great Basin, a large and barren desert.

Encompassing a land area of 82,000 square miles, Utah is the thirteenth largest state. The federal government owns 63.7 percent of the state's lands.



The People

Utah's population more than doubled between 1950 and 1980, and is projected to increase another 12.1 percent between 1990 and 2000. The percent increase in population from 1980 to 1988 is 15.7 percent,

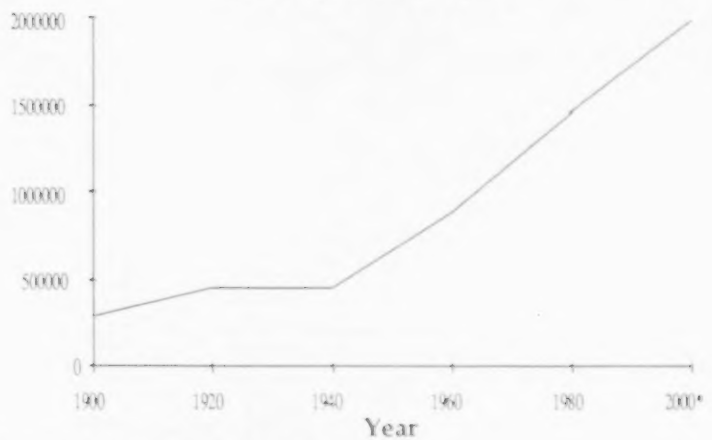
Percent Increase in State Population 1980-1988

National Rank	State	Percent
1.	Nevada	31.7
2.	Alaska	30.5
3.	Arizona	28.4
4.	Florida	26.6
5.	California	19.6
6.	Texas	18.4
7.	New Hampshire	17.9
8.	Georgia	16.1
9.	**Utah**	**15.7**
10.	New Mexico	15.6
National Average		8.5

ranking ninth in the nation. This trend is primarily due to natural increases, the state's high birth and low death rates, rather than in-migration. Throughout much of the state there has been a loss of population during the same period.

Population growth is primarily due to the state's high birth and low death rates, rather than in-migration.

Utah Population Trend



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

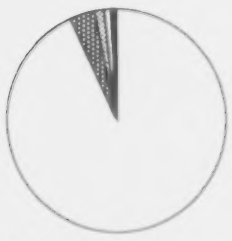
In 1988 the state population was 1,691,000. The population density in urban counties was 246.5 persons per square mile. Salt Lake City is the most densely populated area with 8,185 persons per square mile. The population density in rural Utah is only 3.6 persons per square mile. While more than three-fourths of the 1986 population resided along the metropolitan Wasatch Front corridor from Ogden to Provo, eleven of the state's 24 predominantly rural counties reported that none of their residents live in an urbanized area.

Originally settled by religious followers of Brigham Young, nearly 70 percent of the state's population are members of the Mormon church. Since the mid-nineteenth century when the Mormons first settled into Utah, they have greatly influenced the customs and politics of the state. The emphasis on work, family, church, and community is central to the Mormon religion. Policies toward education, social service, and public service reflect a strong consensus of values among Utah's residents.

Other migration trends have also influenced the state. The transformation of the mountains to luxurious ski resorts has brought an increasing number of outsiders to the state. Migrant workers, following the sugarbeet and fruit harvests, create a seasonal tide, and some have made Utah their home.

Ethnic and racial minorities of Hispanics (3.9 percent), Native Americans (1.3 percent), Asians (0.9 percent), and Blacks (0.6 percent) form less than 7 percent of the state's population. Utah's homogeneity has begun to shift as more Mexicans and Central Americans enter the United States. In 1988, Utah received 6,200 applications from immigrants seeking amnesty.

Utah
Race and Ethnicity
1988



White	93.3%
Hispanic	3.9%
Native American	1.3%
Asian	0.9%
Black	0.6%

Source: Utah Handbook, 1988

Utah is a youthful state. More than one in four residents are between the ages of five and 17, and less than 4 percent are age 65 or older. It ranks the highest in birth rate in the nation, and second in percent of

population under age five. Ranking way below the national average in death rate, Utah residents live a long life. Large and extended families are an important part of Mormon culture and religion.

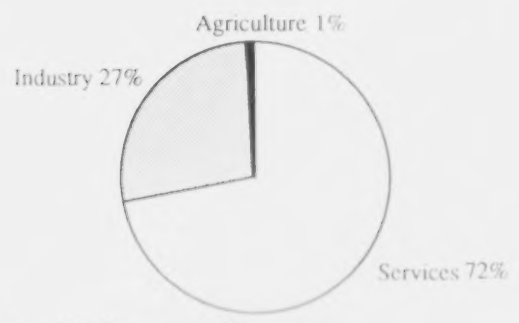
The Economy

Throughout the mid-1980s, Utah newspapers headlined the economic slump and how the national mood of confidence and prosperity had passed them by. The closure of the Kennecott copper mine in the 1970s created a void in the economy and the decline in the mining and steel industries in the 1980s has created an uncertain future for many workers. Currently the state is struggling to recover from the 1980s recession.

While manufacturing, retail sales, and service industries have become increasingly important to Utah's economy, the state is becoming less dependent on mining and agriculture. Service industries, including wholesale and retail trade and the growing $2 billion tourist industry, account for almost three-fourths of the gross state product of $21.8 billion. Manufacturing non-electrical machinery, transportation equipment, and food products are other important economic activities and so is the growing defense industry. In rural Tooele County the economy is heavily impacted by the army depot and training grounds. Just west of the county seat is a bombing and gunnery range. Between Brigham City and Promontory Point is Morton Thiocol, the giant aerospace corporation producing missiles, rocket engines, and space shuttle booster casings. Also rich in mineral deposits, Utah ranks among the leading states in gold, molybdenum, and silver production. Petroleum and coal are the state's leading mineral products; however, with the collapse of energy prices in the mid-1980s employment plummeted drastically. In rural Rich and Morgan Counties, sheep, turkey, dairy and beef cattle ranching are major contributors to the economy.

Both rural and urban areas are struggling to recover from the 1980s recession.

Utah Gross State Product
1985
$21.8 Billion



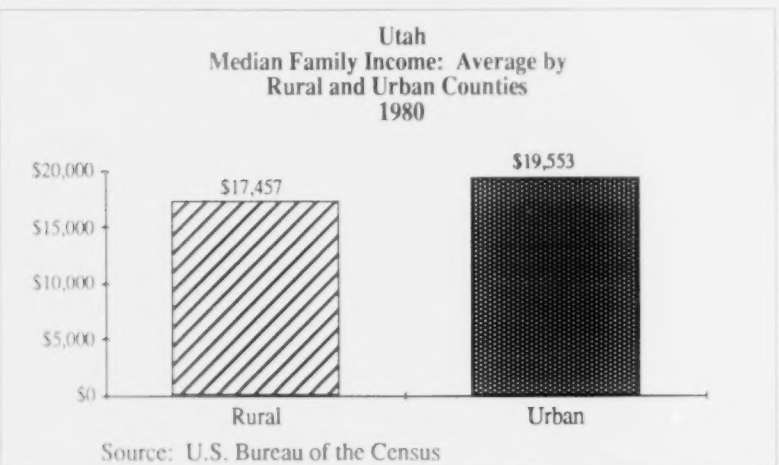
Source: U.S. Department of Commerce

Utah's employment rate in 1988 was 69 percent, slightly above the national average of 66 percent. Nevertheless, the state's rural economy is more vulnerable and in a greater state of decline than its urban economy. From 1980 to 1987, the urban percent increase in employment rose between 17 and 23 percent. This is mainly attributable to growth in wholesale and retail trade centered in urban areas. A few rural counties, most notably Washington, Summit, and Millard, had a very high percent increase in total employment as well, attributable to their relatively strong trade and service industries. But unlike their urban counterparts, many rural counties suffered a percent decrease in employment from 1980 to 1988. Most hard pressed were counties like Grand, Juab, Garfield, Emery, and Rich, which rely heavily on natural resource industries.

In general, then, residents in rural counties experience greater unemployment than residents in urban counties. Reliance on industries like mining, ranching, and farming are certainly more precarious than the relatively more stable urban service and trade economies. In 1986, nearly one in ten rural residents were unemployed (9.4 percent), somewhat higher than the 5.4 percent unemployment rate common in urban counties. Rural Duchesne, Juab, Piute, and Sanpete Counties had an unemployment rate that exceeded 15 percent, and another six rural counties exceeded 10 percent.

Utah's per capita income ranks 48th nationally, at $12,193 annually. Nearly a decade ago there was little difference in the per capita income of the state's urban and rural residents. But today, the per capita growth in many rural areas trails the 40 to 50 percent increase which has occurred in urban areas and some of the more prosperous rural areas.

The 1980 average median family income in rural counties was $17,457 compared to $19,553 in urban counties. While poverty is increasingly



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

both an urban and rural problem, it has hit some rural areas particularly hard. In six rural counties, approximately one third of their population earned less than $10,000 annually, while in another three rural counties one quarter of family incomes were at this low level. In 1979, less than one in five families lived in poverty in rural Sanpete and Wayne Counties, and in another ten rural counties more than one in ten families lived in poverty. The poverty rate throughout all of rural Utah was 10.3 percent, somewhat higher than the 7.4 percent in the five urban counties.

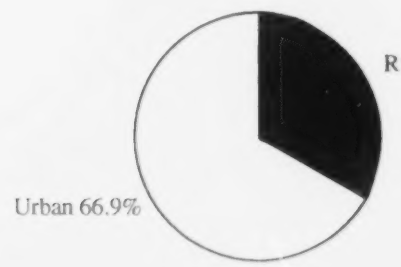
Utah's Rural Schools, Students, and Teachers

Schools are at the heart of Utah's rural communities. In addition to educating children, rural schools are often the location of cultural, recreational, and civic activities.

Characteristics of Rural Schools

In 1988, there were 229 schools in Utah's rural areas organized into 28 school districts. These 133 elementary schools, 37 middle schools, 53 high schools, and six special schools make up 33.1 percent of the state's 692 public schools. Big Water School near Lake Powell and West Desert School along the remote Utah-Nevada border are two of the state's eight rural schools that serve students in grades K-12.

Percent Rural and Urban Schools In Utah, 1988



Source: Utah State Office of Education

From 1976 to 1986, Utah experienced the nation's highest percent growth in school age population (32.2 percent). Since then, the rate of growth has slowed considerably due to out-migration and declining birth rate. The result is a statewide school enrollment trend characterized by slow growth (1.8 percent). Nevertheless, enrollment in kindergarten is roughly twice that of departing high school graduates.

Most rural counties are experiencing a declining school enrollment.

In general, from 1986 to 1988 urban counties experienced a small increase in school enrollment—between 1 and 3 percent. Less than half of the rural counties experienced a similar increase. Washington (8.2 percent) and Kane (4.3 percent) Counties in Utah's thriving "Dixie" region, and Wasatch (6.9 percent) and Summit (3.7 percent) Counties adjacent to the urban Wasatch Front, far exceed the state's average. Nevertheless, most rural counties are experiencing a declining school enrollment. Uintah (-9.2 percent), Rich (-9.1 percent), and other counties either located in the western desert or reliant on natural resource industries have the most notable declines.

The size of rural schools vary from just a few students to several hundred. There are 26 schools with fewer than 50 students, 10 schools with 50 to 100 students, and 40 additional schools with a student enrollment no greater than 250. Nearly 40 high schools in rural Utah have a student population less than 500. All three schools in Daggett County have enrollments under 70 and Halls Crossing, Ticaboo, and Grouse Creek schools have enrollments under 20. Each offers a primary and secondary curriculum.

But not all schools in rural Utah are small. The average enrollment is 391 students, considerably larger than most rural schools in other parts of the Western region. Box Elder High School's 1,446 students is the largest school enrollment in Utah's rural counties. Yet, in the same county there are four schools with enrollments under 60.

Each of the 28 rural school districts has a superintendent. In Daggett and Wayne, the superintendent also serves as principal for two schools, and the Kane County superintendent serves as principal for the local K-12 school. Six rural districts have an assistant superintendent as well. Since many rural schools have a sizable enrollment, only eight principals serve more than one school. In the small, rural schools, however, where there are fewer teachers than grade levels, principals often assume an instructional role. Administrators with multiple roles attend to personnel issues, school finance, instructional leadership, and curriculum enrichment, each of which is equally important to the smooth functioning of the school.

Compared to the urban districts which staff counselors and health practitioners, support services for rural students are scant due to limited non-instructional staff. Duchesne is the only rural district with a social worker. Six districts have one or two full-time psychologists, and another five districts support a part-time staff. More than three-fourths (82 percent) of the state's guidance counselors work in urban schools. Some guidance support is available in nearly all rural districts. Eight small districts, however, have no designated counseling staff. Less than one third (30.9 percent) of the rural school districts have nursing support.

In 1988, 26 schools operated with only one, two, three, or four teachers. Eight schools are one-teacher schools located in small towns like Antimony and Garrison.

Some rural schools are not only small, they are remote. Remoteness in Utah can mean that a school is located more than 150 miles from a central office, students have to travel over an hour on a school bus each way, or that secondary students live in another town in order to attend school. Some Tooele students attend school across the border in Nevada and several children who live on ranches in Wyoming along Utah's border attend school in Daggett County.

The distance between schools in Utah's rural districts can be over one hundred miles, and the distance between school and student's home may be great as well. More than half of all rural students (55 percent) ride a bus to school, while less than a third (32.7 percent) of urban students use school bus transportation. Over one thousand bus drivers transported rural students more than eight million miles in 1988. The average cost per rural pupil is $152, significantly higher than the $53 cost per urban pupil. Daggett County, because of its terrain and sparse population, tops the state with a per pupil expenditure of $549 for transportation.

Utah's Core Curriculum Program of Studies calls for mastery of skills and competencies in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, computer literacy, healthy lifestyles, vocational fields, and electives. Many rural schools successfully offer a comprehensive elementary and secondary curriculum. They also may have facilities and services such as a gymnasium, library and librarian, workshop and shop instructor, and computer laboratory. But the smaller the school, the more remote its location, and the poorer the district, the more likely its curricula, facilities, and services will be limited.

Alternative arrangements such as itinerant services, shared facilities, and employment of paraprofessionals are attempts to overcome this paucity of resources. Perhaps most promising is the programmatic equity and excellence that educational technology can bring to small, rural schools. Instructional Television (ITV) is broadcast daily throughout the state for grades K-12, and programming complements the Core Curriculum. Special visual arts, drivers training, and advanced placement courses are aired via microwave to schools in remote areas. Several rural schools in northeastern and northwestern Utah are connected by broadcast television, microwave television, and audio-graphic phonelines. In the southeastern corner of the state, four schools are sharing classes through microwave television and in the Great Basin, several schools use distance telelearning to increase curriculum offerings and strengthen instruction. In Wayne County, a school bus which transports 50 students more than one hour each way is equipped with audio-visual technology and airs educational programs during the commute.

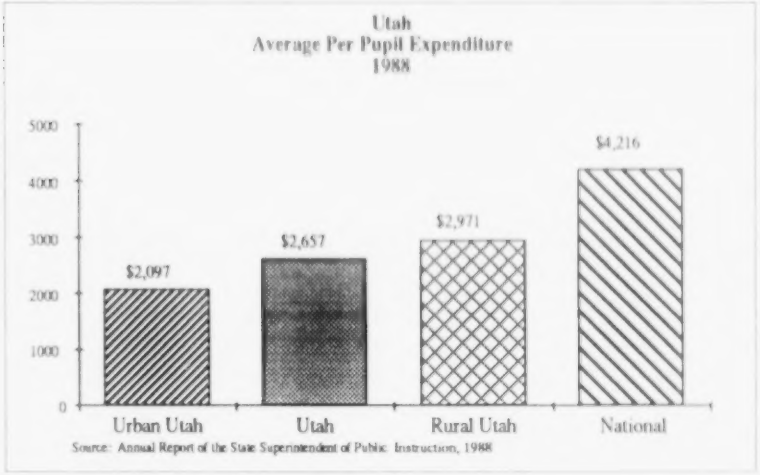
Distance learning technology has also given hundreds of rural students an opportunity to participate in the state's concurrent college enrollment program. Credit earned can be used toward either high school or college matriculation. Live, two-way interaction takes place between students and teachers at The College of Eastern Utah and high schools in rural areas such as Montezuma Creek, Monument Valley, and Sunnyside.

Despite these efforts, rural educators are often hard-pressed or unable to offer all courses every year that are required for high school graduation or college entrance. With the current wave of performance accountability, teachers and administrators in many rural areas find it difficult to keep up with increased graduation requirements and to implement new curricula.

Some rural districts have adopted modified delivery systems such as year-round schooling and extended days. Throughout the state, efforts are underway to utilize more fully school facilities. Rural Grand and North Summit School Districts are operating an extended-day, four-day week in their remote schools. More than 4,000 students are on variations of extended day programs in Sevier, Wasatch, and Washington Districts as well.

The demographics of Utah pose particular problems for school funding. While it has the highest proportion of school age population in the nation, a very low proportion of its population is over age 18 and paying taxes. This is compounded in many rural areas where local tax revenues and property wealth lag behind urban areas. Economies of scale also work against rural schools for fixed operating costs and when funding allocations are on a per pupil basis. The result in Utah is much higher expenditures in rural areas than in urban on a per pupil basis. The average 1988 per pupil expenditure in rural districts was $2,971 compared to $2,097 in urban districts. Rural Tintic and Daggett Districts had a per pupil expenditure of over $5,000. However, rural schools are rarely able to generate the critical mass of funding necessary to purchase, for example, a satellite dish or hire a trigonometry or music teacher. Equal or greater dollars per rural pupil still cannot buy what urban districts can because of their much larger student population. The national average per pupil expenditure was $4,216, ranking Utah second to Arkansas for last place with a statewide average of $2,657.

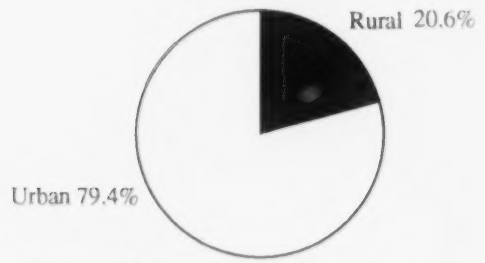
Economies of scale work against rural schools for fixed operating costs and when funding allocations are on a per pupil basis.



Characteristics of Rural Students

Rural schools educated 85,808 students, or 20.6 percent of the state's more than 416,000 children enrolled in public schools in 1988. This number is expected to increase to just over 440,000 by 1993.

Percent Rural and Urban Students In Utah, 1988



Source: U.S. Department of Education

Compulsory school attendance in Utah is from age six to 18. Kindergarten is not compulsory but is offered in all districts and all but eight rural elementary schools.

An overwhelming majority of Utah's rural students are Caucasian (93.8 percent). Daggett and Rich School Districts had no minorities enrolled in the 1988 school year, and three other rural districts had fewer than 15 minority students. Native Americans (2.8 percent) and Hispanics (2.7 percent) are the largest minority groups among rural students followed by a very small Asian (0.6 percent) and Black (0.1 percent) population. San Juan has the highest concentration of Native Americans, most of whom live on the Navajo reservation. The only districts with a sizable number of Hispanic students are Tooele, Carbon, and Box Elder. More than 1,200 mostly Hispanic migrant students were provided special services in 1989, and this number is expected to continue to grow throughout the 1990s. Overall, 6.2 percent of rural students are members of minority groups compared to a slightly higher 7.2 percent of urban students.

Given the ethnic and racial breakdown of rural students, the primary language of those with limited-English or non-English proficiency is Spanish or an Indian language. In 1980, approximately 4.3 percent of the rural school age population had limited-English proficiency or did not speak English at all. A slightly smaller percentage of urban school age children had limited-English speaking skills (2.8 percent).

More than 1,700 rural students have special learning needs. Mainstreaming efforts are placing increasing numbers of students in the least restrictive learning environment possible. In many small, rural

schools, however, this is not a new trend. Blind, deaf, mild, and multi-handicapped students are often taught in the regular classroom because many schools do not have a self-contained classroom or special education teacher. No rural district has a specialist for the visually impaired, five have no speech and hearing specialist, and 22 do not staff a specialist in learning disabilities. The high cost and logistical difficulties of serving a small number of students with special needs often forces parents to move from a rural community to an urban area.

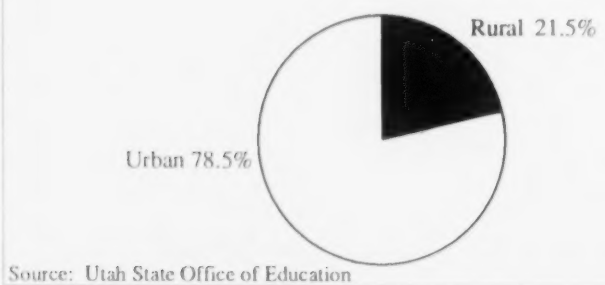
Throughout the mid-1980s, students in Utah's small, rural high schools performed at somewhat lower levels of academic achievement than their urban peers (Lindberg, Nelson, and Nelson, 1985). ACT scores were consistently lower as were basic reading comprehension and math computation skills. Limited curricular offerings for college-bound students may have put them at a disadvantage. In non-cognitive areas such as academic self-concept, independent development, and career awareness, these students also tended to score at a lower level than students in larger and more urban schools.

Utah's high school graduation rate is 80.6 percent, ranking among the top ten states in the nation. This is a rough indicator of the percent of incoming freshman who attended school continuously and graduated four years later. The state's drop out rate was 1.7 percent in 1988. Since 1985, more than 2,500 students dropped out of rural schools, nearly a quarter (22.6 percent) of the state's drop outs during the same period. Teen pregnancy, substance abuse, chronic truancy, and poverty put students at-risk of failing school. For example, in 1980, 1982, and 1984, nearly 3,000 teens were pregnant in rural Utah.

Characteristics of Rural Teachers

Slightly less than 3,800, or 21.5 percent of the state's 17,458 teachers staff Utah's rural schools. Nearly half (46.4 percent) are secondary teachers, 42.8 percent are elementary teachers, and 10.8 percent are special education teachers.

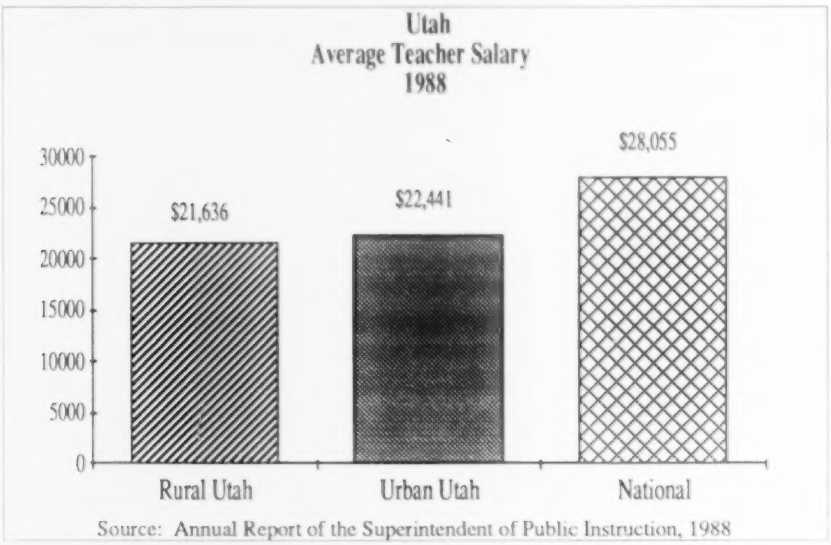
Percent Rural and Urban Teachers in Utah, 1988



Source: Utah State Office of Education

Attracting teachers to rural schools is often difficult because of social and cultural isolation, lower salaries, limited mobility and a lack of personal privacy (Miller and Sidebottom, 1985). It is even more difficult to retain teachers in remote schools than it is attract them. Occasionally a position remains unfilled and either a substitute or principal will teach.

Teacher salaries in Utah are low by national standards, and even lower in rural areas. The average annual salary of rural teachers is $21,636, slightly less than the $22,441 average annual salary of those who teach in urban schools. The annual salary for teachers in Daggett is only $17,297, and three other rural district have annual averages below $20,000. Nationwide the average annual teacher salary is $28,085, considerably higher than in Utah.



Source: Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1988

Attracting and retaining rural teachers is often difficult.

Class sizes in rural districts tend to be smaller, even in Utah which has the largest class sizes in the nation. The average teaching load for rural teachers is 20 students, compared to the urban teaching load of 23 students. In high growth rural areas like Washington County, however, it is not uncommon for class sizes to reach between 30 and 35 students. Nonetheless, smaller class sizes in many rural schools are also characterized by multiple grade groupings. The role of the multi-grade teacher, either at a one-teacher school or at a school with fewer teachers than grade levels, stretches beyond those normally performed by teachers. Teachers in rural, small schools have to be competent generalists, with an ability to individualize instruction, carry on multiple activities, sequence curricular skills across grade levels and content areas, and sometimes assume the non-instructional role of janitor or nurse (Scott, 1986).

Most teachers in Utah's smallest high schools are required to complete more than four preparations a day (63.1 percent). Carrying a high preparation load, coupled with the extra-curricular assignments that teachers in small schools assume, is stressful, time-consuming, and can interfere with other teaching responsibilities. Due to limited staffing, about one third of the teachers are assigned coursework without adequate preparation and outside their content specialization. In general, teachers in rural and small school have less access to collegial sharing and resource exchanging than urban teachers do.

Rural School Improvement

School improvement is the pursuit of any goal that benefits students or teachers and has as its primary focus the classroom or the school (Askins and Schwisow, 1989). In the past decade, school improvement most commonly referred to a specific set of research-based process models which guide schools through a multi-stage effort to strengthen performance and attain specific goals. Typically these processes focus on schoolwide plans and activities, including shaping the school's culture, creating a vision for instructional excellence, strengthening the curriculum, and establishing a school's mission and goals. Other more conventional approaches to improving schools through individual training have continued throughout this period as well. Such staff development activities often address specific instructional and managerial techniques for teachers and administrators.

Improving rural and small schools poses significant challenges. Rural schools are hampered by inadequate resources because of small tax revenue and relatively low apportionment of state and federal funds, small administrative and support staff, and scarcity of support services due to distance from resource agencies such as central administration offices and universities. Despite these impediments, rural schools continue to seek ways to improve the process of education and the outcome of schooling.

This section reviews some of the major statewide and regional school improvement programs available to rural educators in Utah. Included are process-based models and individual training models since they are both necessary to improve the quality of schools.

The Utah Experience

Promoting educational equity for rural students has gained considerable ground in Utah within the last couple of years. Through efforts made by the State Office of Education, Utah's university and college systems, the Regional Educational Service Centers, and private and professional organizations, rural school improvement has become a priority.

There are two main agencies which support Utah's school improvement efforts: the Utah State Office of Education and the Regional Educational Service Centers. Each provides rural educators opportunities to receive professional development, technical assistance, and resources to support school improvement processes.

The Utah State Office of Education (USOE)

USOE is the hub of school improvement activities for rural schools. Activities range from providing teacher and administrator inservices and supporting districts in assessing student performance to facilitating the integration of Outcome Based Education and collaborating with other agencies to implement and assess distance learning technologies.

The USOE "Shift in Focus" philosophy is intended to shape and promote school improvement efforts. It is a mission to empower students to become competent, productive, caring and responsible citizens.

Tapping the potential of technology is a major thrust of USOE's school improvement efforts. Working with the Regional Educational Service Centers, Far West Laboratory, IBM Corporation, and other private organizations, it has initiated and assisted in the funding and coordination of rural school programs which use computer-assisted instruction, instructional television, and interactive distance learning technologies. For the smallest and most remote schools, technology promises to improve program equity and efficiency.

USOE sponsors numerous projects to increase school productivity. Some projects focus on establishing participatory school management techniques and building stronger networks between home and school. Others are efforts to restructure the school and classroom or develop processes that accelerate student learning. These programs aim to teach increased numbers of students on a limited budget while maintaining or increasing the quality of instruction.

Other USOE school improvement activities include assisting schools to implement extended day and year-round schedules and building cooperative arrangements among school districts as an alternative to consolidation. The Utah Principals' Academy offers principals throughout the state inservice training to enrich management, instructional, and leadership skills. The Career Ladder has generated new personnel practices, improved the quality of teacher evaluations, and is a means to reward excellent teachers. USOE has also recently begun to assist districts in developing a school volunteer program. Involving parent and community volunteers in the schools is viewed both as a tool to individualize learning and a support service to students.

Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs)

Utah's RESCs have been active in rural school improvement since the mid-1960s. They are self-governing collaboratives formed by the legislature and rural school districts to coordinate professional interaction among and between teachers and administrators, inservice training, media services, and shared purchasing. They function similar to the way a central administration office supports larger, urban districts. Funding is primarily provided by the legislature.

School Districts Served by Regional Service Centers

RICHFIELD CENTER	HEBER CENTER	PRICE CENTER	CEDAR CITY CENTER
Juab	Daggett	Carbon	Beaver
North Sanpete	Duchesne	Emery	Garfield
Piute	Morgan	Grand	Iron
Sevier	North Summit	San Juan	Kane
South Sanpete	Park City		Millard
Tintic	Rich		Washington
Wayne	South Summit		
	Uintah		
	Wasatch		

There are four RESCs, located in the central, southeastern, northeastern, and southwestern parts of the state. Each offers inservice programs either for the regional districts or an individual district, depending upon need and interest. Outcome Based Education is offered at all RESCs and has become an influential educational approach in Utah's rural schools. Most RESC trainings focus on research-based and practical school strategies. Filmed minicourses on organizing independent learning, individualizing instruction, and curriculum development are also sponsored by RESCs. Teachers and administrators completing these minicourses are awarded two graduate credits through the Utah State University.

RESCs also bring regional school administrators together to discuss common problems, share ideas, set joint priorities, and plan joint activities. Out of this process has developed time-saving and cost-effective purchasing, warehousing, and delivery systems options. Some districts share in the purchase of computer equipment and school supplies and others, for example, share in the delivery of lunch foods and resource materials.

Other RESC services include presenting workshops at the annual Rural Schools Conference, assisting in the writing of proposals, and coordinating the sharing of consultants in curriculum development, distance learning, and special and vocational education. Additionally, the RESCs work with USOE and the Utah Rural Schools Association to sponsor the annual Institute for School Improvement.

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